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SUBJECT: ECUADORIAN ELECTIONS UPDATE

REF: A. QUITO 2500

[B](#). QUITO 2249

[C](#). QUITO 2251

[D](#). QUITO 2076

[1](#). (U) Summary: With less than a month remaining before Ecuador's October 17 elections, there remain several items of concern which, left unresolved, could prejudice a clean and orderly vote. The Embassy will continue to work with electoral authorities to encourage resolution of these issues. End Summary.

Key Election Stats

[2](#). (U) On October 17, an estimated six million of Ecuador's eight million eligible voters will visit 34,618 voting stations to elect 22 provincial prefects (prefects are governor-equivalents; governors are appointed by the President), 219 mayors, 91 provincial council members, 893 municipal council members, and 3,970 members of rural town councils. Although voting is mandatory, turnout rates normally vary between 60-70%. The election campaign began on August 31 and ends on October 14. Media and polling organizations are not permitted to publicize poll results after September 26.

Electoral Preparations Underway

[3](#). (U) The Supreme Electoral Tribunal (TSE) has begun training vote station workers (a total of 276,974 nationwide) and 10,560 political party representatives, who will monitor those stations on election day. TSE President Nicanor Moscoso has approached the Embassy to request that the Ambassador publicly sign an agreement codifying USG assistance to the TSE (\$400,000 from USAID). The Ambassador is disposed to do so once key election procedural issues (see below) are resolved.

Key Issues Unresolved

[4](#). (SBU) Congress has not acted on a request by the TSE that it replace the previous scheme (struck down by the Constitutional Court) to allocate municipal and provincial council seats among parties. President of Congress Guillermo Landazuri has announced, however, that Congress will resume debate on electoral reforms on September 23 (earlier, 52 Congressional deputies made a written request of Landazuri that he kick-start the discussions). TSE President Nicanor Moscoso has publicly pledged to issue a decree to resolve the seat allocation issue, should Congress fail to act. Supporting Moscoso's position and providing political cover, Solicitor General Jose Maria Borja, responding to a congressman's request for an advisory opinion, offered September 22 that the TSE was competent to emit such an order. Until this issue is resolved, the potential for post-electoral conflict over the allocation of council seats among parties is high.

[5](#). (SBU) Most political analysts concur that prospects for Congressional action on the allocation of council seats or to raise or eliminate campaign spending limits are dim. Major parties (Democratic Left and the Social Christian Party) are unwilling to cede ground to proportional representation and oppose campaign finance reforms because, unlike their smaller challengers, the major parties do not fear punishment by TSE bodies, which they can manipulate.

First Case of Election Violence

[6](#). (U) On September 16, according to press reports, a campaign worker was killed by a town council candidate from another party. According to witnesses, Cely Garcia, the campaign worker for the PRIAN party, was shot by Galo Zambrano, the candidate for the Social Christian Party (PSC) while posting PRIAN electoral propaganda over that of the PSC in the town of Viche, San Lorenzo municipality, in Esmeraldas province. Zambrano's driver was arrested, but Zambrano fled. This appears to be an isolated incident.

Observation Issues

17. (U) Citizens Participation, the most prominent Ecuadorian electoral observation NGO supported by USAID, plans to field 3,100 volunteer electoral observers on election day. The group is already monitoring candidates' campaign expenses, including costs for access to the media. On election day, Citizens Participation will conduct a quick count based on a sample of approximately 500 polling stations each in Quito, Guayaquil and Cuenca. Executive director Cesar Montufar told PolCouns on September 21 that no final decision has been taken on when to publicize the results of the quick count; he implied it would likely be on the morning after the election.

18. (U) Local OAS representatives have not been informed whether the OAS will mount an observation effort. TSE President Nicanor Moscoso sent an appeal on September 7 to OAS Elections Coordinator Elizabeth Spehar requesting, in addition to the observation mission requested by the Foreign Ministry, an OAS technical team to assist with monitoring of vote tabulation centers. We believe a positive OAS response to these requests is likely. Should the OAS send an observation mission, the Embassy will offer volunteers.

Campaign Expenses Mount

19. (SBU) According to Citizens Participation, one candidate, Rodrigo Paz, has already exceeded artificially low campaign spending limits in the race for mayor of Quito. By their calculation, achieved by monitoring the air-time for pro-Paz radio and TV advertising, as of September 21 Paz had spent \$52,000, exceeding the \$40,118 limit set by Congress. Overspending is punished by a fine determined in a post-electoral review by the TSE. Paz told PolCouns on September 21 that his main competitor, incumbent Mayor Paco Moncayo, enjoyed an unfair advantage, as he was using municipal funds to publicize public works conducted during his tenure, which is not counted as a campaign expense.

KENNEY